

# **Talbot County Economic Development Commission**

## **Avalon Theatre**

**40 East Dover Street, Easton, MD 21601**

### **December 4, 2014 Meeting Minutes**

**Members Present:** Chairman, Ted Bautz; Scott Beatty; Walter Chase; Kelley Malone; Peter Dunbar; Haim Loran; Paul Makosky and Gerald O'Mara

**Ex Officio Members Present:** Al Bond, Shannon Dill, Mike Henry, Timothy Jones, Art Reeside (for Terenda Thomas), Al Silverstein

**Members Excused:** Vice-Chairman, Geoff Oxnam and Deborah Renshaw

**Attendees:** Mayor Willey, Scott Warner, Tracy Ward and Laura Heikes

**Mayor Willey** welcomed the Commission members to Easton.

**Guest Speaker: Kelly Griffith, Superintendent of Talbot County Public Schools (TCPS)**, has been in Talbot County since 1988 and has worked throughout the TCPS system in four different schools. As Superintendent, Ms. Griffith provided an update regarding all the Talbot County school districts. This year TCPS hired 29 new teachers and 11 of them are graduates from TCPS. TCPS provides professional development assistance and course work so students may work towards a degree to become teachers. This year there are 4,630 students in TCPS districts, 95 more students than last year. The biggest increase of students was in White Marsh school district. TCPS maintains 9 buildings and 8 schools; the largest school being Easton Elementary, with 1,100 students, Pre-K thru 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Griffith reported that TCPS educates special needs children from birth (3 months) until the age of 21. TCPS begins with an initial assessment; then provides therapy as necessary, whether occupational, physical, speech and language prior to beginning school, and then educates them to the age of 21. TCPS has a 92.1% graduation rate; which is excellent and includes goals to better prepare students for technical training, college, or proceeding right into the work force. TCPS is moving more advanced curriculum to younger students to both expose the children early and to include more advance concepts. TCPS offers a variety of career and technology education completers including Auto Mechanics, Biomedical, Visual Graphic Arts, Culinary Arts, Construction and Cabinet Making, Teachers Academy, Business Education Academy, Animal & Plant Science and Agriculture Academy. The students are able to graduate with a certification and college credits in these career pathways. TCPS is currently working on their five-year Strategic Plan and budget with considerations for: students to visit companies; observe different jobs in our community; job shadowing; and, to invite the business community into the schools to share information regarding different careers and pathways in Talbot County. The EDC asked how the commission may assist TCPS; Griffith indicated that each one of the career and technology completers has an advisory board, and suggested commission members volunteer to serve as advisory board members. Griffith will send contact information for the advisory board members, as well as the principals' contact information. In preparation for the Strategic Plan, five community sessions were held and a survey has been collected. Focus Group meetings are scheduled for February 2, 2015 at the Easton High School. TCPS has identified seven areas: Curriculum Instruction; Infrastructure; Community Involvement and Partnerships; Staffing (to determine how to recruit a more diverse staff); Enterprise (to think out of the box); and Equity. Griffith has also been working with the student government groups and they have provided great ideas as well. TCPS is adding a required junior seminar course, which teaches personal finance, how to write a resume, how to interview for a job and how to search jobs online. Griffith ended with her celebrated quote, "Good, better, best; never let it rest, till your good is your better

and your better is your best." Questions included interest in staffing and recruiting teachers and how the EDC can support education and workforce readiness initiatives. A discussion on funding, state contributions, Maintenance of Effort models and the escalating costs of operating a school system were shared. It was mentioned that the Partners of Education meet the first Friday of the month at the Chamber of Commerce and would welcome additional support. Superintendent Griffith expressed interest in a letter of support from the EDC for her budget submittal in February 2015.

**Call to Order:** Chairman Ted Bautz called the meeting to order, with a quorum, at 8:30 a.m.

**Agenda and Minutes:** The EDC approved the December agenda (Chase/Loran). The EDC November draft-meeting minutes were also approved (Loran/Jones).

**Correspondence:** The director reported there is one vacancy for an elected member to the EDC. Correspondence from Bill Wieland offering to serve on the Commission was reviewed. The director recommended EDC continue to forward recommendations for the commission's vacancy, as a compiled list for the County Council's consideration.

**Old Business:** The director reported the recommendations to enact Brownfields legislation for the county have been drafted and will be presented to the EDC at the January 8, 2015 meeting. Pending EDC's approval, the matter may be brought to the County Council at the Quarterly Meeting on January 27, 2015. Previous interest from the EDC, to provide a workshop for contractors and small businesses about federal/state government procurement, has been explored and a source for instruction has been identified. An agenda is being developed with input from the Chamber of Commerce and the Tourism Department to include: streamlining the designation process; computer/technology availability for applicants; bringing awareness to small/minority businesses regarding federal/state contracting; and assisting entrepreneurs through the procurement process. The Waterfowl Networking Breakfast was held on November 14<sup>th</sup> in the Waterfowl Chesapeake Pavilion and was well attended with DBED Deputy Secretary Robert Walker, providing comments. The event is an opportunity to show case the town to prospect and clients. The EDO has advertised for a Business Retention Specialist, a contractual position, 24 hours per week, from December through June, to support the business retention call program. The EDC ad hoc committee met to further explore the broadband coverage for the county and made a recommendation for the topic to receive attention in the drafted 2015 Comprehensive Plan. The Planning and Zoning Commission met on December 3, 2014 to review their final edits to the Comprehensive Plan, which will be introduced in a Public Hearing before being approved and sent to the County Council for their review and approval. The director will keep the commission apprised of the public hearing date, and when the draft goes before County Council. County Council assigned Mark Cohoon, Talbot County GIS Manager, to conduct community's stakeholders meeting on the topic of broadband coverage for residents in Talbot County. Geoff Oxnam, as Vice Chair of the EDC, is included in these meetings. Mary Kay Verdery has been appointed as the Talbot County Planning Officer. The Department of Planning and Zoning is reorganizing their efforts and Ms. Verdery hired an Assistant Planning Officer, Dan Brandewie from Dorchester County. They also have Jeremy Rothwell on board as Planner I. A suggestion was made that the Business Environment Committee reconvene in January and invite Ms. Verdery to speak and provide an overview of the progress towards automating the front-end application process for permits, as well as update us on plans they are implementing to improve customer service.

**New Business:** Ted Bautz reported next month is the EDC's annual meeting and there will be an opportunity to elect the new EDC Chair and Vice Chair. The director reported the EDC comes before County Council on January 27<sup>th</sup> and it will be the EDC's first introduction to the new County Council.

The EDO is working on the update to the Economic Analysis for 2014, as well as a summary of the work completed this year. The EDO materials will be brought to the EDC with the EDO's Strategic Plan, recommendations and budget for review. One budget consideration is for the County Council to create an economic development fund to be utilized for business attraction and development incentives. The Real Property Tax Credit has been approved, for use as an incentive and an amount will be set aside for use.

The criteria includes an investment of \$1 million dollars and the creation of 15 jobs for the County Council to consider a real property tax credit. The Real Property Tax Credit fund will be established in the upcoming FY 16 budget and projects will be awarded in FY 2017. **Business Environment**

**Committee (BEC):** Ted Bautz, Chair reported that the BEC did not meet in November; however, they will schedule a meeting in January invite the staff of Planning and Zoning, Permits and Inspections and the Talbot County Health Department. The director welcomed anyone who has an interest in participating in the BEC to contact the EDO. The meeting is not restricted to commission members. **Marketing**

**Committee:** Haim Loran, Chair reported the committee has been visiting businesses who expressed interest on their survey. A summary of the Business Survey and the reports from the visits will be prepared for review and submitted to the County Council prior to the January Quarterly Meeting. During the business visits, the complaints so far are about permitting, development, and customer service. The effort to attract test labs continues as a major focus of the Marketing Committee with the list of 1,500 labs edited and the letter prepared. The mailing will be distributed to 250 labs at a time allowing ample time for the EDO to follow up with calls and to promptly respond to any interest. The first letters will be postmarked January 15, 2015. Mr. Loran has identified properties in the Town of Easton that would be suitable for any material test labs that choose to come to Talbot County, and additional property will become available in February, when the next phase of construction at Achievement Park is completed to include more medical offices. **Chairman's Report:** Mr. Bautz reported he attended the Easton Town Council's hearing concerning the Food Hub. **Director's Report:** The director reported the EDO has been working on a significant expansion with Mayor Willey and the town regarding the Talbot Commerce Park Annexation. Phillips Wharf Environmental Center (PWEC) has received funding to install new balk heads in Tilghman and assistance has been provided to them for power line identification. PWEC is also submitting a project with Chesapeake College, Center for Leadership in Environmental Education (CLEEn) for a grant-funded environmental training program. The director, Mr. Loran and Mike Klein, (Marketing Committee) met with Hein Olckers at the Inn at Perry Cabin to learn of a substantial investment of \$45 million over a two-year period, and the hiring of 100 employees. The issues will be in hiring and training the workforce and finding adequate housing. Housing of employees may be accommodated on the Inn's property. The Chamber of Commerce is working with Mr. Olcker as well, organizing a system with the hiring process. The EDO participated as a business reviewer for 3 grant submittals for the semiannual round of Maryland Industrial Partnership grants. The director attended a Stem Cell Research Conference this week with Dr. Halasa, an Easton based startup who presented a paper on pharmaceutical prescriptions that impact stem cell research and pain management. **Members'**

**Reports:** Chairman Bautz welcomed **Al Bond, representing the Arts**, to the Commission. Mr. Bond welcomed the EDC to the Avalon Theatre. Mr. Bond provided an overview of the Avalon Foundation. Of interest were all the community events, performances, educational programming and celebrations provided throughout the year by the Avalon. They are also the Public Access Television Station for Talbot County, which reaches over 10,000 households. Last year (2014) the public attended Avalon events approximately 158,000 times and the Foundation is now the largest arts nonprofit on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. 2,400 TCPS students received some kind of curriculum enhancement through the

Avalon Foundation this year. Mr. Bond reported that the foundation faces some challenges including leasing the building on a month-to-month basis; locating additional space for programs; and funding. A question and answer period centered on MCTV station regarding Neilson ratings, measuring data concerning how many viewers watch what programs and how lucky we are to have a live broadcast of the Metropolitan Opera. **Kelley Malone, Town of Easton:** reported a meeting is scheduled on December 15<sup>th</sup> to deliberate and provide legal leadership on the lease agreement proposed by the Easton Shore Food Hub (ESFH). ESHF is requesting a lease of 30 years, with a \$12,000 per year payment, over a period of time. **Tracy Ward, Easton Economic Development Corporation (EEDC)** provided an overview of what transpired during the ESHF's public hearing on November 17<sup>th</sup> as there were differences of opinions among the attendees on several issues. One of the issues was the interest in the Food Hub's request for a farm in Kent County and a state ward of \$500,000 as a matching grant to support this project. If the Food Hub had gotten the farm in Kent County, it would have given back in a number of social programs and benefiting the entire region. The aggregation facility project is the focal point of interest for the EEDC and the Town of Easton. Initiatives include focus on the marketing piece to brand Chesapeake farmers that are growing clean foods to sell to high-end whole sellers and retainers, including Whole Foods and Harris Teeter. A question was posed if the EDC should become involved with this issue since this is a countywide benefit package. Ms. Ward reported that she is in the process of assembling teams of volunteers over the next month. In two months, they will meet with farmers from all over the Eastern Shore and Delaware. Support for this outreach activity will be needed. Another question posed to Ms. Ward was how many jobs would the ESHF project create. Ms. Ward reported the ESHF would create 12 immediate direct jobs; the number of indirect jobs would total about 110. Mr. Bautz reported that the ESHF is the core asset for the region and has attracted interest from larger scale growers. ESHF has viable opportunities that carry skilled jobs. The ESHF is catching people's interest and they are looking at Talbot County, as well as the region, in this new context because the ESHF is innovating and is communicating that innovation. **Scott Beatty, Business Community:** observed that our economy is largely real estate. Mr. Beatty suggested that the Business Environment Committee convene a group of contractors and real estate agents to discuss concerns and issues in residential construction, then take recommendations to County Council. Investment concerns are not just about new development, but also about redevelopment. The bank speaks with buyers who want to renovate and it is virtually impossible. The director outlined the last Development Forum held on September 17, 2014 and suggested the Planning and Permits Departments may want schedule a follow-up meeting with those in the construction and trades industry. It was suggested if contractors were provided a safe anonymous environment, we may obtain some interesting input to support improvements. Mr. Silverstein indicated they have people come to the Chamber, who are afraid to speak up elsewhere, and the biggest issue they have is with not getting a timely answer from the state departments involved in the development process. Mr. Silverstein reported he met with Ms. Verdery, and the Chamber is excited to meet and assist the new staff regarding their improved process. Mr. Silverstein reported the Government Regulatory Committee begins in January and the Chamber will invite the department heads and County Council members to discuss areas where we have problems. The goal is to have everyone's efforts move in the same direction to enhance customer service. **Tim Jones, Chesapeake College:** reported that the college prepares students to graduate and move on to a 4-year school; however, the bigger part of what the college does is provide 2-year degrees and workforce training. It took the college almost ten years to fund the Allied Health building that is under construction today. The building will open in the fall. By next fall, the college will double the number of student nurses in training. In addition to real estate as a driver of our local economy, we are impacted by healthcare and tourism. The college is introducing a second renovation to

an existing building that will include a workforce-training center. A study will be initiated to collect data from the community to determine skills and training required by employers for the non-college bound students in our region. A program statement was advertised for bid, which was publicized in the local papers and on the college website. The project will probably go to a firm in Baltimore. **Walter Chase, Town of Trappe:** Mr. Chase reported the new Sheriff of Talbot County, Joe Gamble, presented to the Trappe Council meeting last night. Additionally last night, Trappe Council voted on an ordinance to amend Trappe's zoning ordinance to create a planned industrial district floating zone for expansion of innovative employment centers including a mixture of industrial, scientific, research, technology and agricultural based business. A company has expressed interest in a 100+ acre property in Trappe. Lastly, a new family-owned restaurant is supposed to open on Main Street in January offering home-cooked fare. **Gerald O'Mara, Agriculture:** Mr. O'Mara reported he invited Jason Wilfred to speak at the Farm Bureau Meeting in January. **Peter Dunbar, Town of Oxford:** reported on the community potluck dinner and almost everyone in Oxford shows up to share the meal together. The Oxford Museum will have their annual meeting and celebrate by burning their mortgage. **Mike Henry, Airport:** reported the airport has experienced steady continued growth; traffic count and fuel have increased 15% as compared to last year at this time. Mr. Henry met with the marketing director of Grandview Aviation, which is a business out of Baltimore that has corporate jets and helicopters. Grandview Aviation is looking to expand their business here on the Eastern Shore and advertise in the terminal. **Haim Loran, Manufacturing:** No additional report. **Al Silverstein, Chamber of Commerce:** reported the Maryland Competitive Initiative is now being administered by Stevenson University. Mr. Silverstein will be attending the meeting on Monday; the Governor Elect will be there to describe his vision for the state. The Chamber Legislative Committee is in the afternoon and Mr. Silverstein will sit on that committee. The committee looks at about 200 bills each year and provides that information back to the Chamber membership. Mr. Silverstein reported Jeanne Haddaway is on the transition team for the governor elect and has four portfolios to review for the programs and services currently offered. **Scott Warner, Executive Director, Mid Shore Regional Council:** reported the Rural Maryland Council has a new campaign regarding the Rural Maryland Prosperity Investment Fund and should be released within the next week or two. Additional information will be provided to Ms. Bethke to bring before the EDC to request support. [www.ruralmarylandprosperity.org](http://www.ruralmarylandprosperity.org). **Shannon Dill, University of Maryland Extension:** reported this year's harvest is complete and cover crops are in. 2014 was a banner year for vegetable, corn, and soybean crops. Currently, the University is working on winter programs, setting up conferences, updates, and trainings. Farm bill workshops were scheduled to work on a new farm bill because there are new decisions for landowners and commodity growers. The 63<sup>rd</sup> Annual Talbot County Corn Club will be held on Thursday, January 15<sup>th</sup> and everyone is welcome to attend by contacting the office to reserve a ticket. Ms. Dill reported although they have not yet run the numbers, she is certain this year will be one of the highest yields to date. Ms. Dill is following the Phosphorus Management Tool pushback. Ms. Dill reported the bill was delayed a couple of times, the economic analysis came out and a forum was held. There were some missing components to the analysis, so Dr. Diriker was unable to complete a full report. The Farm Bureau is asking to wait until there is better science before any policies are put in place. There was an overhaul of the Manure Transport Program; it was difficult to get permitting and funding so they are streamlining the process. **Art Reeside, Business Representative, DLLR:** reported there are about 450 jobs available in Talbot County right now. A lot of them are healthcare related. Healthcare continues to be the biggest employment sector in the county. There is a federal job driven emergency grant program, which will soon be available to manufacturing, construction, transportation, healthcare and IT businesses. Companies may be reimbursed 50-90% of wages for up to

six months. McClain Contracting, Inc., the general contractor for the Dover Bridge project, has indicated they will be hiring in the late winter/early spring for the start of the construction. **Tracy Ward, EEDC:** no additional report. **Mayor Willey, Town of Easton:** reported 17 major construction projects for the Town of Easton have been introduced and are ready for permitting and bid stages. Mayor Willey advised the EDC that the Town has been involved in an accreditation process for Permitting and is being benchmarked nationally. The Town of Easton's permitting process will be nationally accredited sometime this summer. For a town this size, to have permitting and building inspection programs nationally accredited is quite an accomplishment. **Laura Heikes, Senior Vice President, Talbot Bank:** encouraged the EDC to continue to become educated with Superintendent Griffith about TCPS. Ms. Heikes has interfaced with the school system in a number of programs and Talbot Bank has two interns from Easton High School, who believes in the philosophy of, "Grow your own." **Henry Hanna, Senior Advisor, Sperry Van Ness:** reported two vacant properties with assets that could put 150 people to work in the first quarter of 2015 are available and provided additional information about the properties. The meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

**Economic Development Commission Meetings are scheduled at 8:00 a.m. on the first Thursday of each month. The meetings are open to the public. The next meeting will be held on January 8, 2015, at the County Offices on 215 Bay Street, Suite 5, Easton, MD 21601.**

Talbot County 2014				
Month	Labor Force	Employment	Unemployment	Rate
January	18,163	16,906	1,257	6.9
February	17,844	16,644	1,200	6.7
March	18,000	16,836	1,164	6.5
April	18,068	17,069	999	5.5
May	18,520	17,468	1,052	5.7
June	18,869	17,725	1,144	6.1
July	19,205	18,067	1,138	5.9
August	18,732	17,603	1,129	6.0
September	18,371	17,392	979	5.3
October*	18,465	17,505	960	5.2
November	18,136	17,136	1,000	5.5
Average	18,398	17,305	1,093	5.9

\*revised

The Maryland Workforce Exchange and labor market information are available online at <https://mwejobs.maryland.gov/vosnet/Default.aspx>.